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Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in the Central African Republic and on the activities of the United Nations Peace-Building Support Office in that country

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted in response to the statement by the President of the Security Council (S/PRST/2000/5) of 10 February 2000, in which the Council requested me to keep it regularly informed of the activities of the United Nations Peace-Building Support Office in the Central African Republic (BONUCA), the situation in the Central African Republic and, in particular, the progress achieved in political, social and economic reforms, and to submit a report to the Council by 30 June 2000 and every six months thereafter.

2. As members of the Security Council will recall, the primary mission of BONUCA, established for an initial period of one year, is to support the Government's efforts to consolidate peace and national reconciliation, strengthen democratic institutions, and facilitate the mobilization of international political support and resources for national reconstruction and economic recovery. In addition, the Office is expected to promote public awareness of human rights issues and monitor developments in this field. BONUCA, which started its operations on 16 February 2000, is headed by my Representative, Mr. Cheikh Tidiane Sy, whose appointment the Council approved on 1 May.

II. Political situation

3. Since I last reported to the Security Council on the situation in the Central African Republic, political developments in the country have been dominated by the challenge to the Government of Prime Minister Anicet Georges Dologuélé. The ruling Movement for the Liberation of the Central African People (MLPC) expressed its dissatisfaction to President Patassé at the distribution of cabinet posts and particularly objected to the selection of Mr. Dologuélé as Prime Minister. The party wanted more posts to be assigned to leading party members, including parliamentarians. The Government was also caught in the web of major financial scandals. The political situation appears to have improved with the recent nomination of additional MLPC members to the Cabinet and the launching of a major government investigation into the financial scandals.

4. The suspended jail sentences and financial penalties imposed upon two journalists accused of calumny against the Head of State and of incitation to hatred have tarnished the image of the Government. The verdict revived tensions between the Government and the opposition, of which the two journalists are sympathizers. The opposition denounced the trial as an attempt by the Government to silence independent voices.

5. During my official visit to the Central African Republic from 30 April to 1 May, I had a series of useful discussions with President Patassé, Prime Minister Dologuélé and members of his Government as well as with members of the Bureau of the National Assembly. We discussed issues related to national reconciliation and the consolidation of peace in the country; good governance; the preservation and promotion of democratic institutions; the need to press on with reforms to render them sustainable and

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irreversible; and the organization of the Special Donors Meeting of 15 and 16 May in New York, convened specifically to help raise funds for the restructuring of the armed forces within the framework of an integrated approach to security and development.

6. President Patassé expressed deep gratitude for the interest shown by the international community in assisting his country since the 1996-1997 mutinies, and assured me of the determination of his Government to press on with the reforms and other efforts in pursuit of long-term stability and progress.

7. The implementation of the Bangui Agreements and the National Reconciliation Pact (S/1998/219, annex) two pillars of the ongoing process of restoring and consolidating national unity and sustainable peace and stability, was facilitated in several key ways during the period under review. Two ex-mutineers were rehabilitated and recently appointed to key government positions. The revision of the Electoral Code was completed. The Electoral Independent and Mixed Commission (CEMI), which had successfully managed the presidential elections in September 1999, was also strengthened with a control organ to further assure its transparency and credibility.

8. Meanwhile, the Government has institutionalized the payment of pension allowances to former Heads of State, as provided under the Bangui Agreements. Consequently, ex-Presidents Dacko and Kolingba became eligible, while the case of Mr. Abel Goumba, who asked to be similarly treated because he had been interim President for two months after the death of President Barthélémy Boganda, the nation's first Head of State, was rejected.

9. Furthermore, in efforts to consolidate national reconciliation, it was agreed that a general amnesty would be granted to people who had been identified by a parliamentary audit as having embezzled public funds and who were recommended for appropriate sanctions.

III. Human rights situation

10. A disquieting development since my last report has been the alarming increase in reports of extrajudicial killings and summary executions. In the month of May alone, a special anti-crime police squad (OCRB) reportedly executed eight alleged armed robbery suspects without due process. The impunity apparently enjoyed by the perpetrators of these serious human rights violations continues to be a cause of grave concern.

11. An accelerated rehabilitation of local prisons and rejuvenation of a credible judicial system to permit secure detention of criminals awaiting arraignment before the courts could help eliminate the unacceptable recourse to summary executions and arbitrary detentions. In the meantime, my Representative will continue to stress to the authorities the importance of upholding the rights of every citizen, including those accused of crimes.

12. A short-term intensive training session, co-sponsored by BONUCA and the Ministry of Defence, was organized from 3 to 19 May in Bangui for 50 police officers, 50 gendarmes and 50 officers from the Central African armed forces (FACA), to acquaint them with ways to uphold the human rights edicts applicable in the country. The themes covered by the seminar included the role of police in the protection and promotion of human rights; international humanitarian law; the Geneva Convention relating to the status of refugees; and the role and activities of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Similar courses are planned in the near future in the countryside.

13. Additionally, in partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Disabled Persons, a national workshop with 80 participants was organized on 26 and 27 May on the fifth anniversary of the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women, prior to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century", held in New York in June.

14. With support from BONUCA, the authorities have also undertaken to publicize human rights themes in the national media for the benefit of the greater population, through radio broadcasts and articles in various publications in Sango, the country's lingua franca.

IV. Military and security situation

15. The military and security situation in the Central African Republic has remained relatively calm since the smooth transfer by the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic (MINURCA), shortly before its departure, of its security functions to the

police and security agencies of the Central African Republic.

16. As part of the ongoing reforms in the security sector, the Special Force for the Defence of the Republican Institutions (FORSDIR) was dissolved in February 2000 and replaced by a Special Unit in charge of Presidential Security (UPS), under the authority of the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces. However, because of the lack of adequate resources for the police and the gendarmerie to enable them to ensure public order, and in spite of the training programmes initiated and supported by BONUCA for these two bodies, UPS is being called upon to undertake law and order-related tasks that, under normal circumstances, would fall outside the scope of its mandate.

17. An increasingly dangerous situation is being caused by the relentless attacks by armed bandits, which disrupt the safe movement of people and goods, not only within the country but also along roads connecting the Central African Republic with its neighbours. Scores of innocent people have been killed by these bandits.

V. Economic situation

18. The overall economic performance of the Central African Republic has been particularly encouraging in the period under review. Improvements appear to have taken place in the critical area of revenue generation, which so far shows an increase of almost 20 per cent between last year and this year. This can be attributed to the fiscal reforms put into place in this area by the Government.

19. Another joint International Monetary Fund (IMF)/World Bank mission visited the Central African Republic in February/March 2000 to assess the country's overall economic performance in light of the commitments made to the Bretton Woods institutions since their last visit in November 1999. Meanwhile, in accordance with the understandings reached with those institutions on the management of the economy, regular salaries have been paid to civil servants without interruption since March 1999. This action facilitated the release of the second Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility (ESAF).

20. At the same time, however, there is a need for the Government's expenditures to be brought under tighter control if the country is to reach its goal of sustainable growth. The National Assembly adopted in February a budget showing a deficit of 22 billion CFA francs. In spite of the fact that revenue receipts are increasing, the deficit is growing at an even higher rate.

21. The Government, especially following recent financial scandals in State corporations, including in the energy and transportation sectors, stressed its commitment and determination to fight corruption and mismanagement, which should result in increased revenue for the State. In this connection, it is expected that progress on the privatization of remaining State enterprises will enhance their performance and efficiency and thus help increase revenue for the country.

22. However, the economy is currently facing new difficulties which were not even envisaged earlier in the year. The prevailing severe fuel shortage is rapidly becoming a major national crisis. The crisis stems from a disruption of supply to the Central African Republic from its traditional suppliers in the port of Matadi, across the Congo River, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. At the time of this report, alternative fuel routes are being utilized, but at prohibitive costs, thus placing a heavy burden on the fragile economic upturn. There are signs that the fuel crisis may be alleviated in the short term, but a longer-term solution is needed to restore normalcy and to prevent the crippling of the economy.

VI. Special Donors Meeting

23. Members of the Security Council will recall that in paragraph 5 of resolution 1271 (1999), the Council welcomed my proposal to convene in New York a meeting to mobilize the necessary funds for the implementation of the restructuring of FACA and reintegration of demobilized soldiers. The Government, burdened by its heavy external debt and against a background of a weak and fragile economy, will continue to need substantial assistance if it is to carry out the full restructuring of the armed forces while providing essential social services to the population.

24. The meeting in question was organized on 15 and 16 May in New York. It was co-sponsored by the United Nations system and the Government of Germany, in close collaboration with the Bretton Woods institutions. More than 66 delegations from 48 countries and institutions were present. In addition to

addressing the assistance required to implement the security-related reforms, the meeting provided an opportunity to evaluate the Central African Republic's economic performance and the Government's strategy for responding to the challenges posed by the problems of governance and poverty alleviation. Prime Minister Dologuélé led his country's delegation, which also included the Finance and Defence Ministers.

25. In response to the request for assistance made by the Central African Republic authorities, donor countries (namely, Canada, Egypt, France, Germany, Italy and Norway) made substantial pledges at the meeting, amounting to over US$ 38 million. Although they fall short of the US$ 54 million expected by the Government of the Central African Republic for its security and development programmes, these pledges nevertheless represent an important step in the right direction and reflect, above all, the international community's commitment to continue to support the country's stabilization process.

VII. Observations

26. The transition from MINURCA to BONUCA was accomplished successfully. My new Representative and Head of BONUCA, Mr. Cheikh Tidiane Sy, has since assumed duty in Bangui. I am confident that President Patassé and his Government remain fully committed to proceeding with the reforms necessary to consolidate the progress made towards the restoration of stability and the promotion of sustainable peace and development.

27. The Government and people of the Central African Republic have expressed profound appreciation for the support that the country received from the international community during the Special Donors Meeting in New York. They hold high hopes that this support can now be translated into concrete action to help meet their most critical needs, including the ongoing National Programme for Demobilization and Reintegration. Given the country's present economic difficulties, I appeal to the donor community to make every effort to assure an early fulfilment of the pledges made during the meeting so that the security and development projects can soon commence.

28. Because of the conflicts and tensions in the subregion, security will remain a matter of concern in the Central African Republic. Having done so much at considerable cost during the MINURCA era to bring about peace, the international community should remain engaged in this country and take the extra steps needed to complete the task of consolidating peace and stability in the country. In practical terms, this means strengthening the national capacity of the Central African Republic to provide for its own security in the newly restored democratic order.

29. Meanwhile, BONUCA, and the entire United Nations country team in Bangui, will continue to work with the Central African Republic authorities in the implementation of the ongoing reforms, particularly in the security field and in the management of the economy with a view to achieving sustainable peace and development.